



Black Saturday: The immediate impact of the February 2009 bushfires in Victoria, Australia

Author(s): Cameron PA, Mitra B, Fitzgerald M, Scheinkestel CD, Stripp A, Batey C, Niggemeyer L, Truesdale M, Holman P, Mehra R, Wasiak J, Cleland H
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Abstract:

OBJECTIVE: To examine the response of the Victorian State Trauma System to the February 2009 bushfires. **DESIGN and SETTING:** A retrospective review of the strategic response required to treat patients with bushfire-related injury in the first 72 hours of the Victorian bushfires that began on 7 February 2009. Emergency department (ED) presentations and initial management of patients presenting to the state's adult burns centre (The Alfred Hospital [The Alfred]) were analysed, as well as injuries and deaths associated with the fires. **RESULTS:** There were 414 patients who presented to hospital EDs as a result of the bushfires. Patients were triaged at the emergency scene, at treatment centres and in hospital. National and statewide burns disaster plans were activated. Twenty-two patients with burns presented to the state's burns referral centres, of whom 18 were adults. Adult burns patients at The Alfred spent 48.7 hours in theatre in the first 72 hours. There were a further 390 bushfire-related ED presentations across the state in the first 72 hours. Most patients with serious burns were triaged to and managed at burns referral centres. Throughout the disaster, burns referral centres continued to have substantial surge capacity. **CONCLUSIONS:** Most bushfire victims either died, or survived with minor injuries. As a result of good prehospital triage and planning, the small number of patients with serious burns did not overload the acute health care system.

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Resource Description

Early Warning System:

resource focus on systems used to warn populations of high temperatures, extreme weather, or other elements of climate change to prevent harm to health

A focus of content

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Extreme Weather Event

Extreme Weather Event: Wildfires

Geographic Feature:

Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal



resource focuses on specific type of geography

None or Unspecified

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Australasia

Health Impact:

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Injury

Medical Community Engagement:

resource focus on how the medical community discusses or acts to address health impacts of climate change

A focus of content

Mitigation/Adaptation:

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Resource Type:

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Resilience:

capacity of an individual, community, or institution to dynamically and effectively respond or adapt to shifting climate impact circumstances while continuing to function

A focus of content

Timescale:

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified

Vulnerability/Impact Assessment:

resource focus on process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing vulnerabilities in a system

A focus of content